Review of Chris Wickham, Medieval Europe (New Haven 2016)

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Medieval Europe. Chris Wickham.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. viii + 334 pp. + 7 b/w pls. $35.

It is no easy task to condense a millennium of European history into 250 pages. *Medieval Europe* is a testament to Chris Wickham's authoritative command of the material and to his clarity of thought. Few others could have tackled this endeavor with such aplomb. However, as he makes clear from the outset, this book is not intended to be a textbook; instead, Wickham has written a thought-provoking thesis about the integrity (or not) of medieval Europe. There is a strong political and fiscal focus, with particular preoccupations about systems of taxation and administration that underpinned effective regimes. This might not quicken the pulse of all readers—and there is little emphasis on the changing cultural and religious lives of ordinary medieval people—but it is an effective framework for understanding structural shifts and regional comparisons. It also allows Wickham to incorporate an admirable geographical scope, which means that Byzantium, Eastern Europe, and Scandinavia are given more than a passing mention. In particular, we are reminded that the eastern half of the Roman Empire persisted in the guise of the Byzantine Empire and often prospered throughout most of the medieval period, despite the sixth-century conflagrations that engulfed it. It was only in the later Middle Ages that Byzantium experienced a gradual period of disintegration, entrenched by the 1204 sack of Constantinople.

The book has a chronological backbone and Wickham begins by charting the development of European governments and economies as most became simpler in form after the fifth-century fall of Rome. Nonetheless, there are some notable continuities with the Roman world, such as in Francia, Spain, and Italy, where the importance of public power was sustained. This was reinforced by new traditions of assembly politics that underpinned the legitimacy of the Merovingians, Carolingians, and Ottonians at a time when aristocrats saw their power aligned with royal patronage and visibility at the center. These observations prepare the stage for one of Wickham's central contentions, which is the emergence of more local and cellular political communities during the pivotal eleventh century, which required a reconstitution of the public sphere. The new kingdoms of Europe were subject to a strident process of localization, which led to less wealthy, small-scale lordships. The power of centralized assembly politics was replaced by a more fragmented system, dominated by the less remunerative "politics of the land" (34). Three such trends are reiterated throughout the book, with their roots all traced to the eleventh century: localization, growing economic complexity, and increasing literate practices. There are links here to Wickham's earlier work on the "feudal revolution" and how this century saw the growing subjection of the peasantry to local lords during a time of economic, demographic, and agrarian expansion.

Another recurrent observation is that the Roman state had a sophisticated fiscal system based on a land tax, which was lost to all bar Byzantium and al-Andalus. Other European states were not able to match such remunerative efficiency, but during the

central Middle Ages some were developing more complex administrative systems and new forms of revenue. This enabled rulers in England, France, and the Italian city-states to fund war and dynastic adventurism. Concurrently, the strength of local power meant an extension in political engagement as communities of taxpayers asserted notions of consent and public good. However, Wickham stresses that sometimes the only outlet for this enhanced nonelite political antagonism was violence and revolt.

Wickham's medieval Europe is framed primarily by its structures, political and fiscal, with less attention paid to its cultural and religious contours. The occasional forays into surveying regions do include an analysis of Christianization and its effects in Ireland, England, Denmark, Norway, and Poland, where he downplays the cultural homogeneity of medieval Europe. There are also some interesting discursions in chapter 10 regarding female agency, lay literacy, urban identity, minorities, and revolts. However, it is clear that these subjects are not the focus of the book, being invariably aligned with broader points about economic change and the institutions of local power.

Structural shifts resonate throughout the book, but Wickham ultimately highlights a notable continuity within Europe. The old Roman frontier along the Rhine-Danube remained important even by the end of the Middle Ages; the wealthier, more politically coherent states were still mostly south of this border. Nevertheless, in general, fifteenth-century Europe was the product of a millennium of change, most notably the growth of vernacular literacy, the strength of local politics that abutted an increasingly intrusive state, and the emergence of new forms of popular political engagement.

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Craftsmen and Guilds in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods. Eva Jullien and Michel Pauly, eds.
Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte 235. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. 316 pp. €54.

The fifteen essays in this volume, written in English, German, and French, offer fresh material about the crafts in Belgium, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, France, Spain, and Italy. Major topics in the book, each covered by several contributions, include gender, skill, labor relations, and the governance of the guilds. The editors have not attempted to impose an overarching story to this volume, but Rudolf Holbach confronts the literature on late medieval guilds with several social science theories. His investigation focuses on the challenges of insecurity in the late medieval economy, and how these might be overcome through coordination between actors and between institutions. He underlines how "rational choice" theory provides only a limited explanation for the various dimensions of this coordination. This idea of the guild as a coordinating